

Today, Representative Pete Stark, the incoming Ranking Democrat on the Joint Economic Committee, strongly criticized President Bush for failing to extend aid to workers suffering from long-term unemployment.

"The President is a proven underachiever when it comes to helping those struggling in the economy he's failed to fix," Stark said. "Tax giveaways to the rich aren't helping working families put food on the table. I wish the President and Congressional Republicans would get their priorities straight."

Nationally, nearly 1.8 million Americans have been unemployed 27 weeks or more, the highest number of long-term unemployed since September 1993.

In his Weekly Radio Address last Saturday, President Bush did call for a meager short-term extension of unemployment benefits. But, this limited extension would be targeted only at those Americans whose benefits run out on December 28th. It would not provide for any extension of unemployment benefits to the larger number of Americans whose benefits will end in 2003.

"The President's proposal falls way short," Stark said. "It will do nothing to help the estimated 95,000 workers who are exhausting their unemployment benefits every week. It leaves the 1 million Americans who have already exhausted their 13 weeks of temporary unemployment benefits out in the cold."

Stark went on to say, "I commend my Ways and Means Committee colleague Republican Congressman Phil English's efforts to more broadly address the needs of the unemployed. I wish his Chairman, Rep. Bill Thomas would follow his lead."

Democrats are actively crafting legislation to introduce when Congress reconvenes in January to provide more generous unemployment benefits to help those out of work.

"Democrats are committed to getting the economy moving," Stark said. "With long-term unemployment at a nine year high, we recognize that this isn't a trend that's just going to go away. Many Americans need help making ends meet while the economy recovers and new jobs are created."